

Gospel Meetings: A Lost Cause?

Introduction

1. Over the past few decades gospel meetings have become less and less popular.
2. As secular work schedules increase and as our desire for entertainment increases, spending our evenings listening to gospel sermons does not seem quite as exciting as it once did.
3. According to the title this lesson is about gospel meetings, but its true purpose is to cause us to examine our hearts as to whether we are still as hungry for the word of God as Christians once were.

Discussion

I. The History of Gospel Meetings.

A. The name:

1. A gospel meeting is exactly what its name indicates: it is a meeting where the gospel is preached.
2. It is a name that was invented by men, but is based on principles that are firmly established in Scripture.

B. The Pattern:

1. In the New Testament we see the need to be hungry for God's word.
 - a. Matt. 5:6, "*Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness.*"
 - b. 1 Pet. 2:2, "*As newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word.*"
2. Among New Testament Christians such hunger was very great.
 - a. Acts 2:42, "*And they continued steadfastly in the apostle's doctrine....*"
 - b. Acts 5:42: The word of God was welcomed so that the apostles were able to teach it from house to house on a daily basis. There was no lack of people who wanted to know more.
 - c. Acts 17:11: The Bereans were so desirous to know the truth that they searched the Scriptures daily.
 - d. Acts 20:7: In Troas Christians were so thrilled about hearing God's word from Paul that they were willing to listen to his message which went on till midnight.
3. When a special occasion arose for many to hear the gospel, those who were hungry for God's word did not pass up the opportunity.
 - a. Acts 13:43, 44, 48: Paul and Barnabas had an opportunity to preach to a great number in Antioch.
 - b. Though there was not church in that city yet, this occasion provides a picture for the original purpose of gospel meetings—to provide an opportunity for many to hear the gospel message.
 - c. Notice again vs. 44: how did the whole city hear that the gospel was going to be preached?
 - d. Acts 20:7: The Christians in Troas understood the value of God's word and therefore valued the opportunity to hear the gospel preached by Paul.

- e. Gospel meetings today provide similar opportunities, but are we as appreciative as the New Testament Christians were?

C. The History:

1. In what we call the restoration period, when many people were seeing the error of denominationalism and were coming back to the Bible as their only authority, these kinds of meetings were greatly appreciated.
2. In the early 1800's People in America began to develop a great hunger for God's word, just as they had in the New Testament.
3. Though the desire was there, ignorance of God's word was great. So when they had the opportunity to learn from a man, knowledgeable and experience in the word of God, they didn't pass it up.
4. People would travel miles to here the gospel preached.
5. These meetings would often last two, even three weeks.
6. It was during this time period that the term gospel meeting became popular.

II. Gospel Meetings Today.

A. Since the industrial revolution such meetings have not been the same.

1. People became busier and did not have three weeks of evenings to devote to hearing the gospel.
2. Three weeks went down to two weeks. After the fifties, two weeks went down to one week. Over the past decade or so, one week has done down to a weekend.
3. The truth is, people are just as ignorant of God's word today as they were during the restoration, but the desire and opportunity to devote one's evenings to learning God's word has simply faded.

B. Causes of this decline.

1. Many causes can be attributed to this, but let us only look at a few obvious ones.
2. **Busier schedules:** No doubt our society is much more fast-paced than it once was. In order to have any kind of successful life one must be busy. Therefore, it is understandable that we cannot devote weeks at a time, what with other obligations and all.
3. **Lack of hunger:** what is not so understandable, however, is that in our fast-paced society, we have allowed our busy schedules to destroy our appetite for spiritual food. In the New Testament when a Christian learned of an opportunity to hear God's word he dropped everything in order to pursue it. Instead, today people look for excuses. We just don't seem to appreciate God's word any more.
4. **Lack of values:** People sought God's word not only because of spiritual hunger, but because they knew it was important. Today our values are completely scrambled. We are taught that entertainment is more important than God, that school takes preeminence over our service to God, and that learning God's word is a matter of convenience rather than obligation.

III. ~~A Successful Meeting~~ Spiritual Condition of Congregation

A. The Issues that we are dealing with here have more to do with the spiritual condition of a congregation than the success of a gospel meeting.

B. Examination of the heart.

1. We have an opportunity to hear the gospel preached, just as they did in the New Testament.
2. But do we have the same desire to hear the gospel as they did?
3. Each member needs to examine their heart and cast out the things that would hinder them from pursuing God's word.
4. If we are not hungry for God's word then we need to repent of that. The way to crave healthy food is to stop eating junk food. God's word is healthy, but when we fill ourselves up on secular activities it is junk.
5. Each member must put the kingdom first in their heart. That means making God's kingdom so important in your life that nothing will be able to keep you from pursuing the things of that kingdom.

C. Invite people.

1. Regardless of whether we are holding a gospel meeting or not, we should have a desire to save the souls of people around us.
2. Every Sunday is an opportunity to invite others to hear the gospel.
3. But if you are looking for something extra special, this is it.
4. We need to desire God's word and the salvation of others as they did in Antioch when the whole city showed up to hear Paul and Barnabas—and they weren't even Christians yet!

D. Prayer

1. It has been said, "*If you do not pray for the removal of sin from your life, sin will remove prayer from you life.*"
2. This is true of every aspect of Christian life.
3. If we do not pray, how can we expect to have a close relationship with God?
4. If we do not seek a close relationship with God, nothing will cause us to pursue His word with hunger.
5. We must pray, not only for the success of this meeting, but for the spiritual condition of this congregation.

Conclusion

1. Gospel meetings require great time, effort and sacrifice, on the part of the preacher, on the part those organizing it, on the part of those participating in it.
2. If we are not willing to do our part, then the effort and sacrifices of others are wasted.
3. Even more important, if we are not willing to be active in these sorts of things, we should be afraid because it means our spiritual condition very poor indeed.

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